HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Capitol Hill Historic District**	( ) Agenda
Address:	**331 A Street, NE**	(**x**) Consent
		(**x**) Concept
Meeting Date:	**May 26, 2011**	(**x**) Alteration
Case Number:	**11-236**	( ) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Amanda Molson**	( ) Demolition
		( ) Subdivision

Owners Charles Jefferson and Thu Pam, with drawings prepared by Jennifer Fowler, AIA, request conceptual approval to raise the height of the rear roof at 331 A Street, NE and to install new basement windows and window wells on the front elevation. The property is located in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description
331 A Street, NE is a two-story, flat-front brick rowhouse with Italianate detailing such as a bracketed cornice and door header and elongated windows on the first floor. The window pane configuration was changed to 6-over-6 in more recent decades, which included mounting inoperable, narrow shutters on the front elevation. Alley views of the backyard of 331 A are largely blocked by the side wall of the apartment building at 18 4th Street, NE, several two-story carriage houses behind the property, and tall fences in the alley. 331 A is located one house in from the corner property at 333 A (intersection of 4th and A Streets, NE).

Proposal
The applicants plan to excavate the existing basement crawl space in order to construct a family room and bedroom accessible to the outdoors via a new basement areaway in the rear dogleg. Currently without light, the basement would receive two new windows on the front elevation, each of which would open into a window well. Additionally, the inappropriate 6-over-6 windows on the front elevation would be replaced with 2-over-2 windows.

At the rear of the property, the applicants propose to raise the roof height of the rear ell by approximately 3', which would be slightly taller than the low point of main block's roof slope. The roof extension would continue to slope towards the dogleg. The rear ell would be reclad in hardiplank, with windows and doors replaced.

Evaluation

Roof Extension

The proposal to increase the height of the rear roof arguably has the greatest potential impact on the character of the historic district, particularly because the subject property and the corner property at 333 A Street, NE appear (in perspective, if not in actuality) to share a consistent roof height and similar massing. As shown in photos and drawings, the roof height of the subject property actually *steps down* at the juncture of the main roof and the rear ell, while the corner property uses a continuous roof slope towards the rear elevation. As a result, the new roof height at 331 will likely be screened by the corner property in most areas. A basic mockup (string connected by posts) demonstrated that there will be some visibility of the increase in height along the rear elevation, as viewed over the backyard of the corner property. This is a fairly nominal expanse that requires a rather direct view from 4th Street for visibility.

However, the potentially obtrusive view would be the side (east-facing) wall of the extension, as viewed from 4th Street, the intersection of 4th and A Streets, or A Street itself. Visibility of this expanse could prove distracting and would change the perceived balance of this property's massing with that of the corner building. Given the challenge of deciphering a string line from any meaningful distance away, the applicants have agreed to construct a more substantial mockup of the side wall of the addition prior to final approval of the permit application and plans by the HPO. Further Board review will be needed if this element hypothetically proves visible.

Because some of the mechanical equipment will be located on the roof rather than in the attic space or other interior areas, this mockup should include study of where these units will be placed on the roof so that they are not prominently visible.

Front Elevation

The applicants admirably proposed to replace the later, 6-over-6 windows on the front of the house with more appropriate 2-over-2 windows and to remove the inoperable shutters. The wide trim surrounding the existing windows is more typical to frame houses than to masonry buildings, perhaps indicating the opportunity for slightly wider and taller replacement sash within the existing masonry openings. Onsite examination of the present condition by the HPO will likely provide the needed information, and the HPO will also consult with the applicants to ensure that an appropriate brickmould profile is selected for the new installation. It will also be important to specify a 2" wide muntin for the new, 2-over-2 windows, considering the most 2-over-2 replacement windows come standard with a thin and rather insubstantial muntin.

The drawings indicate that the front door will be "removed and replaced," which is understood to be a reinstallation of the existing door. Because the existing door is a 6-panel door that lacks historic precedent for a house of this style or era of construction, a 4-panel or 5-panel wood door should be used in the event that replacement becomes necessary. Though not required, the applicants are encouraged to consider replacement as part of their project, in an effort to more faithfully restore the original condition of the façade.

Meters
The Board has required that new utility meters are located inside whenever possible and that new outside meters are unobtrusive. The demolition (D-2) and first floor (A-2) plans show that the electrical and gas meters currently located in the entry vestibule are planned for relocation outside. At the suggestion of the HPO, the applicants have agreed to keep these meters inside the building, though their location within the interior could certainly be moved if desired.

Basement Windows and Window Wells
Consistent with the Board's design guidelines for new basement areaways (*Basement Entrances and Basement Windows on Historic Properties*), the drawings show the new windows will be located quite close to the grade and will therefore be minimally obtrusive in street views. The new windows are aligned the windows on the first and second stories, and they will continue the 2-over-2 pane configuration that will be restored to the front elevation. Because the window wells serve only to allow light infiltration, and not as a means of egress, they have been limited in their depth to a projection of 18" into the front yard. Additionally, the planned use of flush grates, rather than perimeter fencing, will provide safety around the wells without introducing a new, vertical element to the front yard.

> *4.4 Creating new basement windows may be appropriate if they are unobtrusive and aligned with fenestration of upper stories.*
>
> *4.6 Window wells for basement windows should be kept to the minimum dimensions required by code.*
>
> *4.7 Fences around window wells are discouraged. Decreasing the depth of a window well or providing an alternative means of protection may be required.*

Recommendation
<u>The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff, with the following conditions:</u>

- A more substantial mockup (horizontal and vertical posts) be constructed of the side (east-facing) wall of the roof extension prior to HPO approval of final construction drawings. This mockup should demonstrate that the side wall will not be visible from 4th Street or from A Street, with any deviation from this condition requiring further Board review.

- Utility meters remain on the interior of the property rather than being relocated to the front elevation or front yard.

- The applicants work with the HPO to ensure that the new windows on the front elevation restore the size of the original masonry openings. Appropriate trim and brick molding profiles should be selected in consultation with the HPO.